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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a comprehensive approach to evaluation of programs for postsecondary students with learning disabilities. The evaluation design is suitable for programs in 2-year and 4-year settings, and incorporates both process and product evaluation methods. The approach was used to evaluate learning disability support services at Housatonic Community College (Connecticut) and the University of Connecticut. The evaluation focused on program activities, such as identifying referral sources, processing referrals, implementing direct instructional services, providing testing accommodations, and consulting with on-campus personnel; and program outcomes, such as satisfactory completion of courses, retention, and graduation. Examples are offered of forms generated to manage ongoing data collection and to display longitudinal information regarding program activities and outcomes. Future areas for evaluation of service delivery are outlined. (JDD)

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Evaluating College Programs for Learning Disabled Students: An Approach for Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

As services for students with learning disabilities continue to develop in postsecondary settings, it is important to implement evaluation activities, not only to demonstrate program effectiveness but also to identify areas for improvement to better meet student needs. This paper presents a comprehensive approach used in Connecticut to develop an evaluation design suitable for programs in two- and four-year settings. Through cooperative efforts of personnel from the Department of Higher Education, program directors and an independent evaluator, a model incorporating process and product evaluation methods was applied. This design may have relevance for other institutions considering similar evaluation needs.

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Introduction

Given the fact that students with learning disabilities represent the fastest growing category of students with disabilities seeking access to higher education, learning disability college programs are multiplying rapidly to address their needs. Yet efficacy data pertaining to program models are sparse, which, in a period of limited fiscal resources, places serious restrictions on budget requests. Over a two-year period (1984–1986), the Connecticut State Legislature funded two model programs for college students with learning disabilities. To demonstrate

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the efficacy of these programs, joint efforts of the Department of Higher Education, an independent evaluator, and program directors resulted in a comprehensive model of program evaluation which can be replicated and adapted in other settings.

The purposes of this article are as follows: (a) to describe the involvement of the Connecticut State Legislature and Department of Higher Education in sponsoring two pilot programs for students with learning disabilities; (b) to discuss the evaluation model and process used to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs; and (c) to identify future areas for evaluation of service delivery to such students.

Program Development Background

In Connecticut, concern about the lack of support services for students with learning disabilities at the postsecondary level had been expressed by students, parents, and advocacy groups who lobbied at the state level for program funding. These efforts resulted in passage of a special legislative act in May, 1984, which authorized and funded over a two-year period two pilot programs, one at a two-year and one at a four-year public institution. The Learning Disability Advisory Committee was established by the Department of Higher Education to provide expertise and to select the recipients of the grant. Criteria for reviewing proposals submitted to the Department were determined, and applicants were required to meet with the Committee as well as to document institutional commitment to continue support services following the legislative funding period.

A requirement of the funding act was an evaluative study of the pilot programs to be conducted by an independent evaluator who met in the fall of 1984 with project directors at Housatonic Community College and the University of Connecticut, sites of the support programs. Legislative funding in the initial year for both programs and evaluation activities totaled $55,000.

Evaluation Activities and Results

Overall, goals of the pilot programs were outlined in the legislative act and included diagnostic evaluation, individualized instruction, consultation with faculty, and testing accommodations. Within the context of these service areas, an evaluation plan was outlined, discussed with project directors, and implemented at each institution during the first semester of program operations.

In planning the evaluation process and procedures, the Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) model (Stufflebeam, Foley, Gephart, Guba, Hammond, Merriman, & Provus, 1972) was adapted. Stufflebeam, et al., define educational evaluation as "the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives" (p. 40). Figure 1 illustrates the emphasis placed on process and product evaluation activities since context and input variables were addressed by each institution as part of the grant proposal review procedure. Both schools had demonstrated a critical need for support services for students with learning disabilities. Additional on-campus resources such as Counseling Services, Disabled Student Services, Math and Writing Centers, and Mental Health Services were identified as ancillary supports which could be utilized by the students. Personnel requirements, budget allocations, and facilities and space needs were factors included in the grant applications.

So that efficient data collection techniques could be systematically applied, the independent evaluator met with each program director to discuss methods for obtaining information and to establish a timeline for collecting data. Two major aspects of the programs constituted the focus for evaluation:

a. *Program process*, or the manner in which the program implemented activities designed to meet program goals.
b. *Program product*, or the results of providing services designed to assist students with learning disabilities.

Context	Input	Process	Product
What is the context in which the program will operate?	What program services are needed to meet program goals?	What methods and activities are implemented to operationtionalize program goals and objectives?	What are the outcomes achieved through program implementation?
What needs underlie program development?	What are the personnel requirements for program implementation?		
What resources already exist?	What are the budgeting considerations?		
	What are space and facilities needs?		

Adapted from Stufflebeam, D. L., Foley, W. J., Gephard, W. J., Guba, E. G., Hammond, H. D., Merriman, H. O., and Provus, M. M. (1972). *Educational evaluation and decision-making*. Itasca, IL: Peacock.

Figure 1. Evaluation questions adapted from the CIPP model

Given the scope of the evaluation component as well as the audience for the evaluation report, several measurement techniques were used to generate descriptive statistics and anecdotal evidence regarding program implementation and outcomes. Figure 2 provides an overview of areas for evaluation and data collection methods.

In conducting evaluation activities, it is important to develop forms which provide a clear and concise overview of data. Program directors and the evaluator generated a number of tables which were useful in managing on-going data collection and displaying longitudinal information regarding program activities and outcomes. Several examples of these forms are illustrated in Figure 3.

Interim reports and briefings regarding the evaluation process were important in substantiating to the Legislature that funds were being used to facilitate educational opportunities at the postsecondary level for students with learning disabilities. In both settings, mean grade point averages for students with learning disabilities receiving support services were higher than the required 2.0 for satisfactory academic status. Retention rates of 82% at Housatonic Community College and 92% at the University of Connecticut demonstrate without doubt that postsecondary education is a realistic and attainable goal for qualified students with learning disabilities. Data from the evaluation study were used effectively to lobby for additional legislative funding. In 1986, the Legislature approved funds for an additional program at another state four-year institution and for two consortia which provide

consultation and on-site technical assistance to public and independent institutions interested in implementing support programs.

Additionally, as Stufflebeam, et al., suggest, evaluation should be a dynamic process through which "activities are evaluated to influence decisions, which influence activities, which are in turn evaluated, ad infinitum" (p. 215). As a result of the evaluation process, both programs have revised or modified various facets of service delivery based upon analyses of data. It is this process of using evaluation findings for decision-making which underlies Stufflebeam's statement that "the purpose of evaluation is not to prove but to improve."

Focus of Evaluation	Data Collection Methods
Program Activities	*Review of:*
Identifying referral sources	Project logs
Processing referrals	Project logs
Implementing direct instructional services	Staff reports and weekly summaries
Providing testing accommodations	Project logs and staff reports
Consulting with on-campus personnel	Administrative calendar and log
Program Outcomes	*Review of:*
Satisfactory completion of courses	Transcripts and dean's list
Retention	Grade point averages by semester
Graduation	Transcripts and commencement lists

Figure 2. Areas for evaluation and methods of gathering data

Table 2
Summary of Referral Follow-up Activities

Follow-up Activity	1984/85	1985/86
Intake interview		
Psychoeducational evaluation		
Referred to other sources		
LD program services		

Figure 3. Example of data collection forms

Table 3
Summary of Direct Services

	# of Students Served		Mean Hours per Week	
	1984/85	1985/86	1984/85	1985/86
Individualized instruction				
Group instruction				
Consultation				

Table 5
Semester Summary of Grade Point Averages

	Semester		
	Spring 1985	Fall 1985	Spring 1986
Number of students			
Mean GPA unweighted			
Mean GPA weighted			
Range			
Mean credit hours			

Figure 3. continued

Table 6
Overview of Student Status

	Semester	
	Fall 1986	Spring 1987
Lower division		
Upper division		
Graduated		
Dismissed		
Withdrew		
Dean's list		

Figure 3. continued

Future Directions

The commitment to provide equal educational opportunities at the postsecondary level for students with learning disabilities is obvious. As we in AHSSPPE look ahead to the second decade of promoting equality for individuals with disabilities, we again are in a leadership position to demonstrate the benefits of implementing Section 504. Accountability should serve as a catalyst to objectively analyze services offered to students so that commitment to continually improve is grounded in sound data-based information. Many issues relating to college students with learning disabilities need to be systematically investigated: accessibility as it is affected by admissions policies; longitudinal studies to determine outcomes of service delivery at the postsecondary level; efficacy of instructional approaches and compensatory strategies.

The approach and model described in this paper yielded results which were influential in funding issues at state and institutional levels. Efforts to refine evaluation procedures and interface with other campus resources using such data are underway in both settings. As a larger data base emerges, use of inferential statistical techniques will provide additional findings for judging decision alternatives and ultimately improving educational opportunities for students with learning disabilities.

REFERENCE

Stufflebeam, D. L., Foley, W. J., Gephart, W. J., Guba, E. G., Hammond, H. D., Merriman, H. O., and Provus, M. M. (1972). *Educational evaluation and decision-making*. Itasca, IL: Peacock.